



Minister of Public Health Dr Feroz delivered a speech at the World Breastfeeding Week event held in Kabul. Photo: Ministry of Public Health KABUL 4 August 2015 - The Ministry of Public Health, WHO, UNICEF and partners celebrated World Breastfeeding Week at an event held in Kabul today to raise public awareness on the importance of breastfeeding for the health of children and mothers. World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated every year during the first week of August in more than 170 countries to encourage breastfeeding and improve the health of babies and mothers around the world.

"During the last decade Afghanistan has gained significant achievements with respect to children's health and nutrition. However, these achievements are not enough and there is much more to be done for the improvement of health services and prosperity of the country," said Dr Firozuddin Feroz, Minister of Public Health. "We should do our best to increase the awareness of mothers and families on the importance of breastfeeding for the health, growth and well-being of their children. We are going to work together with other relevant partners to increase public awareness in this regard."

This year's World Breastfeeding Week theme "Breastfeeding and Work: Let's Make it Work" aims to support women to combine breastfeeding and work. Whether a woman is working in the formal, non-formal or home setting, it is necessary that she is empowered in claiming her and her baby's right to breastfeed.

"Balancing work and family life is necessary for the realization of women's rights and having a healthy workforce. Everyone benefits from enhancing mother-friendly workplaces and maternity protection," said WHO Country Representative Dr Richard Peepkorn. "Of all the known life-saving interventions for infants, breastfeeding has the most impact and is the most cost-effective. Exclusive breastfeeding and adequate complementary feeding are key interventions for improving child survival, reducing deaths among children under 5 years of age by about 20%."

UNICEF Representative in Afghanistan, Akhil Iyer, noted that we can help millions of working mothers give their babies the best possible start in life by supporting stronger workplace policies that promote breastfeeding. “Apart from the benefits to the baby and mothers, there are benefits to the employers, as well, with reduced absenteeism, greater staff retention and increased staff loyalty. Working mothers who breastfeed tend to take less time off because their children are less likely to be sick; and workplaces that have accommodating policies for their working mothers have seen a drop in women quitting, which saves employers’ recruitment and training costs.”

According to the National Nutrition Survey of Afghanistan, 69% of Afghan children are breastfed within one hour of birth and 58% of children are exclusively breastfed up to six months. Every year more than 100 000 children under the age of 5 die, of which 48 000 lose their lives because of malnutrition. Globally every year more than 3 million children under the age of 5 die of malnutrition.

Breastfeeding in the first hour of birth can reduce infant and child mortality by 22% and exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months has been shown to decrease child mortality by 13% by protecting children from complications of prematurity, newborn infections, diarrhoea and pneumonia. Breastfeeding is the best way to provide infants with the nutrients they need. WHO recommends exclusive breastfeeding starting within one hour after birth until a baby is 6 months old. Nutritious complementary foods should then be added while continuing to breastfeed for up to 2 years or beyond.

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